DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 433 024 IR 057 409

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TITLE	Information Ethics for Librarians and Librarianship.
PUB DATE	1999-03-00
NOTE	11p.; Paper presented at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga as part of the Lecture Series on Ethics.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Access to Information; Censorship; Copyrights; *Ethics; Information Technology; Intellectual Freedom; Internet; *Librarians; Library Policy; Library Role; *Library Science; *Library Services; User Needs (Information)
IDENTIFIERS	American Library Association

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on ethics for librarians and library science in the age of electronic information. First outlined is the "public relations nightmare" that the Internet is creating for the administrators and the library staff. It is suggested that libraries pick a common sense approach that involves the library staff and community and that an honest approach to problems is necessary. The paper then goes on to discuss librarians as information consultants whose service should be compared to service provided by other professionals where identification is used to establish the rapport needed to fully assist their clients, to be available for follow up information, and to be accountable for the information provided. Presumptions behind the model of librarians as educators are outlined and the role of social ethics is discussed. Discussion then moves to copyright law in the digital age. The paper suggests that the moral value of information can be realized only by bringing the standardized classification system into accord with library patrons' specific self-understanding, life situation, and personal needs. It concludes by outlining strategies librarians can use to achieve this objective of accord, focusing on reference service, local cataloging, and public service projects. (AEF)

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ED 433 024

Information Ethics for Librarians and Librarianship

A paper presented at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

As part of the Lecture series on Ethics

March, 1999

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Information Ethics for Librarians and Librarianship

American Library Association (ALA) in its 1995 code of Ethics and in the Library Bill of Rights clearly states that every one should have access to information. In a democratic society, intellectual freedom, is the foundation and substance of the common good. It is the capacity for the self-regulation of thought and action that is the moral foundation of political life. In a political system, grounded in informed citizenry, we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom, and to freedom of access to information. Librarians play the role of a mediator by selecting, organizing, producing, disseminating, and facilitating the use of information (Alfino & Pierce, p.37). Electronic resources are just another medium of processing and retrieving information. The only difference is that where as earlier, librarians could select materials to be placed on library shelves, now their job is to **deselect** some of the information that is not suitable to the interest of the community they serve. For example, restricting access to sexually explicit materials to the minors. Restrictions are being imposed to protect the child from potentially immoral or suspicious literature, as for example, the Y-chip solution (Internet Summit, 1998). The problem is this type of restriction solely based on chronological age, would appear to be in direct violation of the "Library Bill of Rights." If information can have moral value, how can we justify providing access to materials that may be harmful? One answer would be to revise the mission statement (Stichler, 1991).

Internet services provide a large uncontrolled, unregulated collection of resources. There is no selection and yet librarians are put in a position to deselect certain sites and themes. Some see it as censorship. The question is-

1) Can such an attempt at de-selection be done without excluding items that may be relevant or necessary for the community?

2) Is de-selection possible from a technological standpoint?

3) Is de-selection a viable strategy for Internet resources management?

4) Should these resources be excluded from the library?

The answer to all these questions is an emphatic NO.

Internet is a powerful tool in acquiring and identifying information sources for the majority of patrons. They need access to the information it provides. For the most part

there is a feeling of great opportunity. On the one hand, there is wealth of information in online and Internet resources, and on the other hand, are the low quality, non-authoritative sources of information, and the costs of supporting access.

Hyman (1997) and Field (1997) give some insights into -how are **librarians coping** with this problem of pornography on the net? (Hyman, 1997 & Field, 1997)

1. One of the options is to allow open access, and let them use it at their own risk
2. Some of them advise the parents, or require them, to supervise their children
3. Others let parents give permission of access to a limited extent
4. Some use signup sheets and lay down time limits and than monitor access
5. Others have installed filters at all or some of the terminals (Ford, 1998)
6. Some of them have taken off the graphic interface
7. Other librarians have designed furniture or screens to prevent an overview so that the patrons can have privacy

Public Relations Nightmare

Internet is creating a public relations nightmare for the administrators and the library staff.

***Patrons are unhappy and ask*:**

1.Is this is what you spend my tax money for?

2. Now let me see, I can sign up for only half an hour, and no more than twice a week, and you cannot provide Internet trained staff to help me?

3. You say that I should be a responsible consumer of information, because Internet contains inaccurate information…Never you mind!

Staff revolt:

1. The staff does not want to take on the role of screen police, age police, permission police, and collectors of 10 cents per page, as print fee.
2. The staff is fearful of looking foolish, or not being what passes for politically correct.
3. The staff is afraid of being sued, or of losing their jobs, or going to jail, (Mintz, 1990) and,
4. Of having a dialogue with the users, and finding out that they wouldn't recognize the Bill of Rights, if they read it, and would vote against it, if they did.

The authors suggest pick a common sense approach. There isn't a perfect choice. What ever you pick will probably change anyway. Involve your staff and your community. Be forthright about the problems.

Over the last 50 years, while library community has espoused intellectual freedom movement, they have relinquished the role of a moral arbitrator. It is not clear if the community has! It appears that too often the level of moral responsibility that the community places on the library is more than the library can accept. The library should become a place that analyzes and recognizes the information needs of the community, helps the community in identifying its needs, and helps the patrons meet their needs. Heterogeneity of population in communities, and the loss of truly shared religion and cultural identity, make it impossible for library to meet the information needs of the entire community, and remain a place that espouses a particular set of moral principles to the exclusion of others. When the profession adopted "Intellectual Freedom" as its motto it ended its role as a moral custodian. Library's moral mission is, responsible and sophisticated use of information, not the cultivation of particular views on any subject. If history can be our guide, let us look at some of the examples that help us think how passage of time gives us a better perspective on the problems we are facing regarding the internet.

In1954 the state of Alabama passed a law calling for the labeling of all books used in the state education system as to 1) Whether the author is or is not or ever was a member of the Communist party. 2) The law also stated that this information was to be provided on authors cited in such books. Estimates indicated that in one large library in the state, a quarter of the collection would be involved. It would take staff pasting in 300 labels a day to get the project done in a year. The law was declared unconstitutional, the same year it was passed.

Four decades later in 1995, a similar bill was introduced in the state of Washington, which would have required librarians to segregate all materials with homosexual themes or characters. The Washington law targeted a different "enemy," but revived the same intellectual freedom and logical nightmare. It was also repealed.

Information Consultants

As "information consultants" librarians help patrons make prudent decisions on how to evaluate the results of their inquiries by providing a personal touch. Service provided by librarians should be compared to service provided by other professionals like teachers, lawyers, doctors etc., where identification is used to establish the rapport needed to fully assist their clients, to be available for follow up information, and to be accountable for the information provided (Information Ethics, 1990).

Moral value of information is not technical or technological; it is a qualitative reflection of why sophisticated information skills are important for living in a technological culture. Openness has brought a flood of poor quality information into the library. Librarians and patrons have to assume responsibility for judging the quality of information. The library collection can no longer speak for itself, since the newest addition to the library are as likely to be electronic gateways to other resources. In this environment the ability of librarians to help patrons to think critically about their information needs becomes of paramount importance.

Duty ethics would prompt librarians to help the patrons find most pertinent information on the subject of their search, but would impel them to let the patrons make their own decision and not to influence their autonomous thinking. The ALA Code states "Provide accurate, unbiased, and courteous response to all requests." D.J Foskett (1962) states that "During the reference service, the reference librarian ought to virtually vanish as an individual, except in so far as his personality sheds light on the working of the library."

Let us apply this thinking to the famous cases of Robert Hauptman and Robert Dowd. While studying in library school in 1975, Hauptman visited six public and seven academic libraries. He asked reference librarian's help in locating information that will help him learn how to build a bomb. He was astounded to find that reference librarians in all the thirteen libraries readily acceded to his request. There was only one of them who refused to help him, because he was not a student at that university. Robert Dowd visited thirteen libraries dressed in the garb of a drug user and asked for reference help to learn how to freebase cocaine. While only four libraries had the information

requested, none refused to help him on ethical grounds (Wilson Library Bulletin, 1976, p.626-27).

Is neutrality the best answer in such circumstances? For good reason the Hauptman and Dowd cases have become textbook cases of conflict between personal and professional roles in librarianship (Alfino & Pierce, p. 6).

Historic mission of librarians has been education. As educators librarians can train patrons in the evaluation of both retrieval tools and the information retrieved. They can teach them how to judge and evaluate the authority, accuracy and the reliability of the information retrieved from Internet. The presumptions behind the educational model are: -

1) Information is important

2) Information is not neutral

3) The job of the librarian is to assess the patron's needs and skills and plan a strategy for the patron to access and evaluate needed information

4) The patron's job is to evaluate the information provided and to use it to meet his/her needs

5) The librarian is responsible for providing the best information possible; and

6) The patron is required to disclose their information needs in order for the librarian to offer the best assistance.

Social ethics prompt librarians to provide an equal opportunity to every citizen to find access to all the information. Information rights have become crucial components in fulfilling our rights and obligations as citizens and as human beings. Rights based ethical theories make more substantial claims about the nature of the human person than the duty ethics. Most people think of rights in context of political rights. But in ethics we recognize the importance of "moral rights" or "human rights," as well. Today sellers and manufacturers often inform the buyers about the make up and the use of a product. The pharmacists inform the patients on the side effects of the drugs they dispense. Foods carry detailed labels about the contents and expiry dates. Manufactured goods carry safety instructions. These are good examples of "information right" that grew out of "moral rights".

Copyright Law

The digital age is providing innumerable opportunities in an emerging global marketplace. The key advantage of digital information is that once produced, it is easy and cheap to disseminate. This has however, raised the question of unauthorized use of intangible or intellectual properties, on a massive scale. Internet commerce, for example, will have far flung consequences for exciting copyright laws, and the future of technically protected information (Samuelson, 1998).

From the standpoint of copyright law, it is okay to borrow a copy of the play from the library and share it with friends. Photocopying favorite pages is generally considered "fair use." It is permissible to read a play not so much because one has paid for a copy, but because the law does not confer on the owners a right to control the reading of protected, or copyrighted works. **The main concern of the law has been to stop people from becoming alternative publisher of the work (multiple copies), or undercutting other commercial exploitations.**

But the rules that have served well in print do not carry over well to the digital world. For one thing, it is impossible to use any work that exists in digital form without also making a number of temporary copies so that you can see the material. After all, the principal right of authors and publishers is to control reproduction of their works. In 1995, the Clinton administration issued a policy white paper, "Intellectual Property and the National Information Infrastructure," which spelt out its implications. The white paper made the assertion that because temporary copies do get made, copyright owners are entitled to control all browsing and reading of their works in digital form. It is also contended in the white paper that the "first sale" principle is outmoded. The abolition of the "first sale" principle would have a profound effect on libraries. In the past, when a library stopped subscribing to a particular journal, for example, it still had back issues available for patrons. But when information is licensed, canceling a subscription would mean losing all access. Publishers would be entitled to demand the return of CD-ROMs, reference databases, or to trigger embedded technological locks, to keep users out. Some publishers envision an information future ruled by a "pay per-use" system. It is technologically possible for consumers to get license for each use. The Clinton administration's white paper strongly endorsed this vision. Why shouldn't

recording companies issue CDs that are coded to self-destruct or lock up after 15 plays, forcing those who want to hear more, to pay more.

To guard against the possibility of theft, some established copyright-based enterprises have been spending hefty sums to create technological "locks" for their products. They are also seeking amendments to federal copyright law that would outlaw any tempering with these locks. Some copyright owners worry that what one technology can do, another technology can often undo. They have lobbied Congress to make it illegal to circumvent technical protection systems, and to outlaw the manufacture or sale of software that make circumvention possible. Congress debated the issue this year, pondering on the options. Hollywood strongly pushed a total ban on circumvention. Libraries and educators were among those arguing for a banning circumvention only when the purpose is to infringe on the copyright. Congress chose a general ban on circumvention, with some exceptions (e.g. criminal cases).

The American Library Association, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, and a handful of other groups, have sought to speak for the ordinary Americans, whose lives will be profoundly effected by what Congress decides this year. American citizens need to have a broader public conversation about the kind of information future and the role of copyright. An information society, in which all information is kept under lock and key, available only under terms and conditions dictated by a licenser, would not be worthy of name. We need to work instead toward a new status group that preserves the values that are already built into copyright law. It should allow authors and publishers to thrive while also promoting the widest possible use of their creations (Lifer & Rogers, 1997). The moral value of information can be realized only by bringing the standardized classification system into accord with library patrons' specific self-understanding, life situation and personal needs. To achieve this objective of accord librarians have several strategies

1) Reference service, especially the "reference interview" through which librarian gains a qualitatively rich understanding of the patron's needs

2) Local cataloging, which allows librarians to develop additional subject headings and appropriate call numbers to let local collections reflect a level of organization appropriate to the needs of local patrons; and

3) Public service projects, including educational services, display and selections of holdings, which appeal to the needs and interests of local communities.

John Ester (1993) says, we intuitively know that some human activities are self-fulfilling, self-realizing, self-actualizing, because they involve the achievement of some goal or the development of some talent. We are happy for people who win a lottery, but we admire people who graduate from a university. Consumption activities produce happiness up to a point and then a declining or even negative utility. By contrast, self-realizing activities often begin with a negative utility (the pain of training, for instance) which turns positive as talents or goal is achieved. The most intuitive connection is to see information as an enabling condition for self-actualizing experience. Information broadens our traditional concern of rational reflection. It integrates whole range of data, knowledge, even wisdom, with the process of reasoning that were typically held out in isolation from them. When we try to live out our moral values, we find that they commit us to particular information practices. These enabling information practices formulate the basis of the ethics for librarians and librarianship.

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